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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceptions of educational leadership candidates of the efficacy of a leadership matrix based on the University of Wyoming's belief matrix model for guiding the examination, clarification, and articulation of their beliefs. A pilot study involving 15 administrator certification candidates suggested the usefulness of the survey and some modifications. A total of 45 administrator certification candidates were surveyed in fall 2002 about their perceptions of the Leadership Matrix. Findings indicate that the potential of the Leadership Matrix for candidate reflection, examination of beliefs, and use in future interviews seems good. The matrix also seems to have potential as part of a culminating portfolio to demonstrate to outside evaluators that the examination, clarification, and articulation of candidate dispositions are part of the school leader curriculum. (SLD)

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Clarifying Dispositions:

Study of Administrator Candidate Perceptions

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Clarifying Dispositions:
Study of Administrator Candidate Perceptions

The importance of leadership dispositions, defined by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC, 2002) as beliefs and attitudes that impact future decision-making, cannot be underestimated. According to Charlotte Danielson (2002), the beliefs held by school faculty and administration are the most important determinant of the culture, policies, and practices in that school. However, unexamined beliefs tend to be highly resistant to change. Danielson suggests it is essential for school leaders to help staff and parents explore and clarify the school's beliefs and the impact of these beliefs on the school program. It would seem logical that future school leaders must first examine, understand, clarify, and be able to articulate their beliefs before undertaking a possible substantive discussion with school staff and parents.

The clarification of beliefs is also important from a practical standpoint. The Educational Placement Consortium (composed of the University of Iowa, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Indiana University) gathered nationwide perceptions from school executives of current candidates for administrative positions. This study revealed that one common mistake made by principal candidates in an interview was the inability to succinctly articulate their leadership beliefs (Educational Placement Consortium, 2000).

Consequently, it is incumbent on educational leadership programs to aid future school leaders in the examination, clarification, and articulation of their beliefs. One suggested method is the Belief Matrix concept initiated for pre-service teachers at the University of Wyoming. Pre-service teachers were asked to identify their beliefs about teaching and learning in a matrix as they prepared to enter the job market. Teacher candidates reported positive responses and results from the concept (Berube, Morrison, & Von Krosigk, 1998). Based on these reports, the educational leadership faculty realized that a matrix based on the Educational Placement Consortium findings could be a benefit to candidates in the principal preparation program (Stader, Von Krosigk, & Neely, 2001). Principal candidates exposed to the belief matrix concept in the summer of 2001 at the University of Wyoming reported that the matrix facilitated reflection, increased ability to articulate beliefs, and resulted in a higher level of confidence (Berube, Morrison, von Krosigk, & Stader, 2002).

Purpose

Very little research exists on how educational leadership preparation programs can assist candidates with the clarification and articulation of their beliefs. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to determine leadership candidates' perceptions of the efficacy of a Leadership Matrix based on the University of Wyoming belief matrix model in guiding the examination, clarification and articulation of their beliefs.

Methodology

A pilot study involving fifteen administrator certification candidates enrolled at Southeastern Louisiana University in the summer of 2002 was undertaken. After a guided discussion of the importance of beliefs and the use of the Leadership Matrix, candidates completed various sections of the matrix. Candidates were then surveyed with

a Likert type questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the efficacy and future value of the matrix.

Initial results were positive. However, after a focus group discussion, two survey questions were significantly modified. The revised survey will be administered to approximately 80 administrator candidates enrolled at Southeastern Louisiana University exposed to the revised Leadership Matrix concept (Examples 1 & 2) in the fall and spring of 2002/2003. This presentation will present preliminary results from data collected in the fall of 2002.

Results

A total of 45 administrator certification candidates were surveyed in the fall of 2002 regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Leadership Matrix in facilitating the clarification and articulation of their beliefs. Approximately 90% of the survey respondents are female with the majority (69%) reporting their highest earned degree as Bachelors. Most (57%) have fewer than ten years experience teaching, and 21% have administrative experience. Their immediate career goals included assistant principal (71%), principal (22%), and central office or supervisor (7%).

A summary of perceptions are presented in Table One.

Table One
Candidate Perceptions of the Leadership Matrix

Key: 1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree
N=45

Descriptor	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The Leadership Matrix helped me to understand my fundamental beliefs	3.2	.70
2. The Leadership Matrix will help me in future interviews	3.45	.78
3. The Leadership Matrix helped me understand why beliefs are important	3.2	.80
4. My beliefs clarified in at least one area of educational leadership	3.2	.67
5. Starting with a suggested matrix was beneficial to my understanding	3.4	.77
6. I will continue to apply the matrix as my career & environment change	3.3	.73
7. The Leadership Matrix provided a framework for reflection	3.4	.78
8. The instructor provided too much guidance in completing the matrix	1.9	.56
9. The matrix helped me articulate my beliefs	3.3	.71
10. The instruction and classroom interaction was structured to allow for the development of my personal beliefs	3.3	.71

Discussion

Preliminary data indicates that the majority of the responding leadership certification candidates perceive the Leadership Matrix to be beneficial in the articulating, clarifying and understanding of their beliefs. The candidates perceive the matrix to be of benefit to them in future interviews, and at least at the time of the survey, intend to continue to apply the matrix as their situations change. One example of this application occurred in an informal interview with a newly appointed high school assistant principal who had recently completed the Principalship course in which the matrix was introduced. One unsolicited comment to the author of this project was "The belief matrix was the best thing you did! I used it in my interview for this position and still use it to help me stay on track."

Two other comments from candidates in response to the survey included:

> "I think this is probably the most effective tool to help me in the advancement of my career! Thanks!
>
> "The matrix clarified my beliefs! (I needed that)."

Although some candidates had negative reactions to the matrix, none made comments on the survey instrument.

In addition to using the matrix as a guide in future interviews, respondents perceived the matrix to provide a framework for reflection. With the increased emphasis on reflective practice (see for example Sergiovanni, *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*, 2000, Brown & Irby, *The Principal Portfolio*, 1997, etc.) this reflective framework may be one of the most important benefits of the matrix. Preliminary data indicates that candidates appreciate and need a model matrix to guide their developmental process. This data also indicates candidates want guidance and interaction with the instructor to complete the matrix. However, how much influence the beliefs, values, and experiences of the instructor, the arrangement and selection of model responses, the preferred pedagogical practices of the instructor, and the influence of peer interaction remains in question.

Conclusions:

The potential for the leadership matrix for candidate reflection, for examination of beliefs, and for future interviews seems good. The matrix also would seem to have potential as part of a culminating portfolio to demonstrate to outside evaluators that the examination, clarification, and articulation of candidate dispositions are part of the school leader curriculum. However, the validity, evaluation, and possible scoring of submitted matrices remain problematic at best.

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